

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 217784
ORIGIN EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 SMS-01 HA-05 ICAE-00 NSCE-00
ICAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 INRE-00 PA-01 L-03 /048 R

DRAFTED BY EUR;SOV;JGHUFF:EUR;P;WGEHRON:REH
APPROVED BY EUR - WHLUERS
D - JTRATTNER
EUR;SOV - WTSHINN
S/MS - MJOYCE
HA - CBRODY
DESIRED DISTRIBUTION
ICA

-----121415 261927Z /43
O 261910Z AUG 78 ZFF4
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW NIACT IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, UR, US

SUBJECT: PRESS GUIDANCE: PENTECOSTALISTS AND ARMENIANS
IN EMBASSY

1. FOLLOWING IS DEPARTMENT PRESS GUIDANCE ON TWO SIT-IN CASES:
2. BACKGROUND ON TWO CASES. SEVEN SOVIET CITIZENS OF THE PENTECOSTALIST SECT ENTERED THE US EMBASSY IN MOSCOW ON JUNE 27. AN EIGHTH MEMBER OF THE GROUP, A 16-YEAR-OLD BOY, WAS STOPPED BY THE SOVIET MILITIA (I.E., SOVIET POLICE) GUARDS OUTSIDE. THE GROUP CAME TO THE EMBASSY TO PURSUE THEIR DESIRE TO DEPART THE USSR AND EMIGRATE TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE UNITED STATES.

3. THE SEVEN REMAIN AT THE EMBASSY, STAYING IN THE CONSULAR WAITING ROOM. THEY HAVE SAID THEY WOULD LEAVE THE EMBASSY VOLUNTARILY, BUT ONLY AFTER THE 16-YEAR-OLD BOY IS REJOINED WITH THEM AND ALL ARE ALLOWED TO EMIGRATE.

4. SINCE THEY ARRIVED AT THE EMBASSY, WE HAVE DISCUSSED THEIR SITUATION WITH SOVIET OFFICIALS BOTH IN WASHINGTON AND IN MOSCOW -- THOSE DISCUSSIONS ARE CONTINUING.

5. ELIZA OVSEPYAN, A SOVIET ARMENIAN WOMAN AND HER TWO SONS, AGES 5 AND 8, ENTERED OUR EMBASSY IN MOSCOW ON AUGUST 10 AND SHE ALSO EXPRESSED HER INTENTION TO REMAIN THERE UNTIL GRANTED PERMISSION TO EMIGRATE FROM THE USSR TO JOIN RELATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES. SHE HAD TWICE BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL IN OBTAINING EXIT VISAS FROM SOVIET AUTHORITIES.

6. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS -- SHOULD PENTECOSTALISTS AND ARMENIAN WOMAN LEAVE.

7. Q. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE AMBASSADOR IN MOSCOW ORDERED THE PENTECOSTALISTS AND MRS. OVSEPYAN AND HER TWO CHILDREN TO LEAVE THE EMBASSY PREMISES AND THAT THEY HAVE DEPARTED. DOESN'T THAT EMBASSY ACTION IN GIVING THEM UP CONFLICT WITH THE ADMINISTRATION'S HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY?

8. A. NO. IT HAS LONG BEEN US POLICY TO REFUSE REQUESTS FOR ASYLUM AND NOT TO PERMIT SIT-INS AT OUR DIPLOMATIC ESTABLISHMENTS. THIS POLICY IS BASED ON COMPELLING PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS. OUR MISSIONS ABROAD HAVE NO RIGHT OF EXTRATERRITORIALITY. THEY HAVE NO MEANS OF HELPING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CITIZENS OF THE HOST COUNTRY EXCEPT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAWS AND REGULATIONS OF THAT COUNTRY. TO ALLOW HOST-COUNTRY NATIONALS TO REMAIN IN OUR MISSIONS WOULD RAISE FALSE HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS ON THEIR PART AND ON THE PART OF OTHERS WHO MIGHT BE ENCOURAGED TO DO THE SAME THING. THIS COULD CAUSE THEM UNNECESSARY HARDSHIP AND WOULD NOT, IN THE LONG RUN, SERVE THE CAUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

9. THIS IS WHY THE THE AMBASSADOR REQUESTED THE PENTECOSTALIST GROUP AND THE ARMENIAN WOMAN AND HER CHILDREN TO LEAVE. HE POINTED OUT THAT REMAINING IN THE EMBASSY WOULD NOT IMPROVE THEIR SITUATION OR THAT OF THEIR CO-RELIGIOUS BROTHERS OR OTHER ARMENIANS IN THE USSR. WE HAVE MADE REPRESENTATIONS TO THE SOVIETS ON THEIR DESIRE TO EMIGRATE AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO.

10. Q. WHY SHOULD THE PENTECOSTALISTS OR MRS. OVSEPYAN BELIEVE SOVIET ASSURANCES REGARDING THEIR FUTURE WELL-BEING?

11. A. WE FRANKLY HAVE NO GUARANTEE THE SOVIETS WILL NOT ARREST THE PENTECOSTALISTS OR MRS. OVSEPYAN OR TAKE

MEASURES AGAINST THEM. HOWEVER, THEIR CONTINUED SIT-INS WERE NOT HELPING THEIR CAUSE.

12. Q. ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT THE PENTECOSTALISTS' WELL-BEING NOW THAT THEY ARE WITHIN REACH OF THE SOVIET AUTHORITIES?

13. A. YES, INDEED. WE HAVE SOUGHT FROM SOVIET AUTHORITIES THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE ASSURANCES THAT THE GROUP WILL NOT BE PUNISHED FOR THEIR ACTIONS. IN RESPONSE TO A REPRESENTATION MADE BY AMBASSADOR TOON, THE SOVIET AUTHORITIES INDICATED THAT THEY WILL TAKE NO REPRISAL AGAINST THE PENTECOSTAL GROUP IF THEY HAVE DONE NOTHING CONTRARY TO SOVIET LAW. THE SOVIET AUTHORITIES ALSO INDICATED THAT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE PENTECOSTALISTS' EMIGRATION CASE WOULD BE EXAMINED.

14. Q. WEREN'T THE PENTECOSTALISTS' AND ARMENIANS' ACTIONS A VIOLATION OF SOVIET LAW?

15. A. I CAN'T SPEAK FOR THE SOVIETS ON THEIR LAW. OUR HOPE AND EXPECTATION IS THAT THE SOVIETS WILL NOT PROSECUTE THESE PEOPLE.

16. Q. WHY WERE THE PENTECOSTALISTS PERMITTED TO REMAIN IN THE EMBASSY FOR SO LONG?

17. A. THERE WERE HUMANE AND COMPASSIONATE REASONS FOR PERMITTING THEM TO REMAIN.

18. Q. THE PENTECOSTALISTS CLAIMED THAT THE AMBASSADOR GAVE THEM NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO LEAVE THE EMBASSY PREMISES. IS THAT CORRECT?

19. A. THE PENTECOSTALISTS REMAINED IN THE EMBASSY IN MOSCOW FOR 8 WEEKS. IN ASKING THEM TO LEAVE THE EMBASSY, THE AMBASSADOR POINTED OUT THAT THERE WAS NO WAY THIS WOULD HELP THEM ACHIEVE THEIR OBJECTIVES.

20. Q. DID YOU EVER CONTEMPLATE THE USE OF FORCE IN THIS CASE?

21. A. NO.

22. Q. NOW THAT SHE HAS LEFT THE EMBASSY, WILL THE US BE CONCERNED WITH WHAT HAPPENS TO THE ARMENIAN WOMAN AND HER TWO CHILDREN?

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23. A. YES. AS WITH THE PENTECOSTALISTS, WE HAVE ASKED THE SOVIETS NOT TO TAKE ACTION IN REPRISAL AGAINST MRS. OVSEPYAN. WE WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR HER SITUATION AND TO HELP HER EMIGRATION CASE IN EVERY WAY POSSIBLE.

24. Q. DO THE SAME HUMANITARIAN CONSIDERATIONS WHICH PERTAIN TO THE PENTECOSTALISTS ALSO APPLY IN REGARD TO THE ARMENIAN WOMAN AND HER TWO CHILDREN?

25. A. YES.

26. Q. IS THERE ANY POLICY ABOUT THE USE OF THE EMBASSY IN A SITUATION SUCH AS THIS?

27. A. THE USE OF THE EMBASSY FOR SIT-INS IS CONTRARY TO LONG-STANDING POLICY AGAINST REFUGE, EXCEPT UNDER EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES INVOLVING CIVIL DISORDERS OR SIMILAR THREATS TO A PERSON'S LIFE. IT IS INCONGRUENT WITH THE NORMAL FUNCTIONS OF OUR EMBASSIES OVERSEAS. WE REPEATEDLY ATTEMPTED TO RESOLVE THIS MATTER IN A HUMANE AND COMPASSIONATE WAY.

28. Q. WHY WOULD YOU MAKE AN EXCEPTION IN THESE CASES?

29. A. I DON'T WANT TO GO INTO THAT, OTHER THAN TO POINT OUT THAT THERE WERE HUMANE AND COMPASSIONATE REASONS FOR DOING SO.

30. Q. IS THERE ANY PRECEDENT FOR THIS TYPE SITUATION?

31. A. WE HAVE NOT RESEARCHED SOME 200 YEARS OF AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC HISTORY. HOWEVER, AS I STATED, WE VIEW THIS SITUATION AS MOST UNUSUAL IN THAT BOTH PARTIES ARE SIMPLY EXPRESSING A DESIRE TO EMIGRATE FROM THE USSR AND DID REMAIN IN THE EMBASSY AS A MEANS OF MAKING THIS POINT.

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32. Q. IS THERE A PRECEDENT IN THE CARDINAL MINDZENTY CASE?

33. A. THE TWO SITUATIONS ARE CLEARLY NOT COMPARABLE.

34. Q. DID EITHER THE PENTECOSTALISTS OR MRS. OVSEPYAN ASK FOR ASYLUM IN THE EMBASSY?

35. A. NEITHER ASKED FOR ASYLUM.

36. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS -- SHOULD REFUSE TO LEAVE

37. Q. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE AMBASSADOR HAD A FORMAL STATEMENT READ TO THE PENTECOSTALISTS AND THE ARMENIAN WOMAN WHICH URGED THEM TO LEAVE THE EMBASSY, BUT THEY DID NOT GO. DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENT ON THIS?

38. A. THE AMBASSADOR DID MAKE A STATEMENT TO BOTH

GROUPS AS PART OF OUR ON-GOING EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THESE MATTERS. THE AMBASSADOR EXPRESSED SYMPATHY FOR THE PENTECOSTALISTS AND FOR MRS. OVSEPYAN'S PLIGHT BUT NOTED THAT THEIR CONTINUED STAY IN THE EMBASSY WAS NOT HELPING THEMSELVES AND, IN THE PENTECOSTALISTS' CASE, WAS NOT HELPING THEIR FELLOW PENTECOSTALISTS IN THE SOVIET UNION. HE NOTED THAT THE TWO SIT-INS WERE MAKING MORE DIFFICULT THE EMBASSY'S TASK OF ASSISTING OTHERS WHO ALSO NEED AND DESERVE THE EMBASSY'S HELP. THE AMBASSADOR STRESSED THAT THE EMBASSY WILL CONTINUE TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO ASSIST THESE PEOPLES' DESIRE TO EMIGRATE AND THAT THE EMBASSY WILL KEEP IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH THEIR CASES. HOWEVER, THE PENTECOSTALISTS AND MRS. OVSEPYAN, DESPITE THIS MOST RECENT EFFORT BY THE AMBASSADOR TO ASK THEM TO LEAVE, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DECIDED TO REMAIN.

39. Q. WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE? WILL YOU FORCE THEM OUT?

40. A. WE WILL CONTINUE TO DISCUSS THEIR SITUATION WITH

THEM AND WITH SOVIET AUTHORITIES. WE DO NOT PLAN TO USE FORCE.

41. DOWNGRADE APPLICABLE PARAGRAPHS TO UNCLASSIFIED

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WHEN APPROPRIATE ACTIONS AND RESULTS HAVE TAKEN PLACE. CHRISTOPHER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS, PRESS RELEASES, EMBASSIES, RELIGIOUS GROUPS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 26 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE217784
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: EUR;P:WGEHRON:REH
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780350-0505
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780819/aaaaapuu.tel
Line Count: 269
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 1e28f25a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1607348
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESS GUIDANCE: PENTECOSTALISTS AND ARMENIANS IN EMBASSY
TAGS: PINT, SOPN, SHUM, UR, US
To: MOSCOW
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/1e28f25a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014